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In Memory of
Henry Hill Hickman.

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# Sermon,

—at—

## Bromfield Church,

—on—

## Sunday, April 6th, 1930,

—by—

## The Rev. Preb. F. W. Joyce

(formerly Vicar of Harrow).

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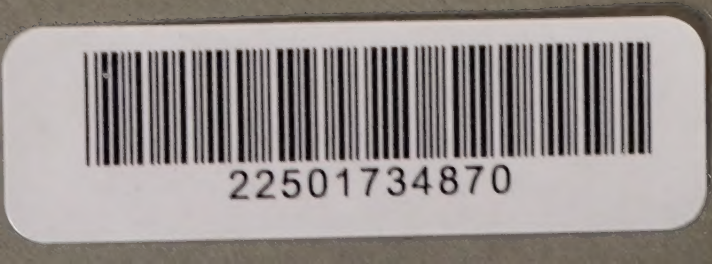
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# Sermon.

Ps. xxi, 4 (P. Bk. vers.) :—"He asked life of Thee, and Thou gavest him a long life: even for ever and ever."

## I—OUR NATURAL DESIRE FOR LONG LIFE.

A long life is what most of us desire to have. It is quite true that, from the days of Job and Elijah down to the present hour, we human beings do pass, from time to time, through certain stages of pain, physical, mental, or spiritual, when we may feel utterly sick and tired of life, and when we are quite ready to echo those cries of despair:—(Job iii, 2) "Let the day perish when I was born," or (i K. xix, 4) "Now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers" None the less it is a fact that most of us human beings, at most periods of our life, even to the stage of "hoar hairs," do desire long, and ever longer life. This desire is an instinct within us, implanted in us by our Creator Himself; no doubt for His own good purposes. It is a natural, inborn, and therefore wholly justifiable desire. With all its trials and troubles and misfortunes we do love our life. We love life itself. We love the very fact of existence. Therefore we desire "long life"; and to the last, even in old age, it is a wrench to our whole being to part with life, i.e. with the earthly stage of life

The fact is, of course, that LIFE is our greatest human asset. It is our greatest human possession; or, rather, it is our best

human gifts in this present state of human existence. Our life covers and contains all our other possessions here—whatever they may be—the happiness of home and family, the zest of our work and employments, the recreations and enjoyments of life, the money also necessary for securing these things. When life ends, all these other things, whether they be good or bad, so far as earthly conditions are concerned, end also.

## II—THE GREAT PLACE OCCUPIED IN HUMAN LIFE BY THE MEDICAL PROFESSION.

Hence the unique importance of the Medical Profession as the safeguarder and, to a certain extent, the saver and the prolonger of human life.

The Medicine Man has ever been a man of power amongst his fellow men, whether his patients happen to be princes or paupers. It is easy for anyone of us, so long as we are in health and strength, to criticise the medical men and their methods. "Physician, heal thyself," is a cheap gibe. But when it comes to our own hour of sickness, most of us are glad enough to have the Doctor called in. When accident lays us low, we soon have the Surgeon fetched to our aid. It is then that we look to our trained fellow men, not only for advice and skill, but for the healing touch of sympathy also. And ready enough are most of them to give it to us, as also are those in the great Nursing Profession who serve under them.

Meanwhile of all Professions it is probably that of Medicine and Surgery which, during the last two or three generations, has through its scientific progress raised itself to the highest proficiency. No other Profession today would seem to be so highly educated

Certainly the length of its training is a very prolonged one.

And then—as to Medical Pioneer work—how grand has been its history for the past century, or so. We know that in our own generation, not once nor twice only, Medical Men have been actually laying down their lives in dangerous research work, such as that of X-rays and radium. But indeed, when you come to think about it, does not half the secret of Pioneer work lie in this very virtue of courage? Men dare, in the first place, to IMAGINE; and then, one here and one there, dares to go further than Imagination. He dares to stake his all in following up the IMPLICATIONS OF IMAGINATION. He dares to stake his name, and his fortune, perhaps his very life, on the pursuit of some half-discerned discovery.

## III—THE PIONEER WORK OF HICKMAN.

Such a Pioneer was Henry Hill Hickman, the young Surgeon; Born at Lady Halton, in this Parish, on Jan. 27th, 1800; Baptised in this Church; and, 30 years later, Buried in this Churchyard, just 100 years ago yesterday.

On Hickman's pioneer work I wish to say a few words, and to give you here and now two short extracts from his own writings on the subject. You may read, if you will, his fuller mind on the whole question in the small Souvenir Book on his Life and Work which is being published this month by the Director of the Wellcome Historical Museum (54 Wigmore Street, W 1.)

It should be always borne in mind that Pioneer work on the larger scale must, as a rule, be the work of many hands. It certainly was so in the case of Hickman. In his Anæsthetic researches he was beholden to

the great Chemists of a previous generation, for the necessary knowledge of the gases to be used; and also to the great Physiologists, Harvey and others, who had studied the circulation of the blood. Nevertheless Hickman was a true Pioneer, alike by instinct and by perseverance. He started with the vision of a great principle, the principle of ANÆSTHESIA THROUGH SUSPENDED ANIMATION BY INHALATION OF GAS. This great principle he worked out—so far as his short life of experiment permitted—to the end.

Now let me give you his own words:—

(1) The first extract shows that he had what Milton somewhere calls the "public soul." The extract is taken from the beginning of a Pamphlet Letter which Hickman addressed, in 1824, to his friend and supporter, Mr. T A Knight, of Downton Castle. The Letter is headed:—"TO THE PUBLIC." "It may be said, and with truth"—thus the young Surgeon writes—"that publications are too often the vehicles of self-adulation, and as such suffer greatly from the lash of criticism; but the author begs to assure his readers this his views are totally different, merely considering it a duty incumbent on him (as a medical practitioner and servant to the public), to make known anything that has not been tried, and which ultimately may add something towards the relief of human suffering, arising from acute disease. The only method of obtaining this end is, in the author's opinion, candid discussion and liberality of sentiment, which too commonly is a deficient ingredient in the welfare of so important a profession, productive of serious consequences, not only to the parties themselves, but to the patient whose life is entrusted to their care." The style of Hickman's English sounds perhaps

to our modern ears somewhat stilted and somewhat involved. But, reading between his lines, cannot we discern the ideals of the young pioneer's enthusiasm (he was then, remember, only 24 years of age) and, set over against those ideals, the irresponsive attitude of his elder brothers in the great Medical world?

(2) The other extract I would ask you to note is with regard to his Vivisection experiments. It is quite evident that there were Surgeons in those days, no less than in our own, who really cared for animals and really felt for them. Hickman says :—"The experiments were necessarily made on living animals, but they were confined to animals previously condemned to death; and as their lives were preserved, and their suffering very slight (certainly not so great as they would have sustained if their lives had been taken away by any of the ordinary methods of killing such animals) I venture to hope that they in the aggregate rather received benefit than injury."

So much, then, for Hickman's own views, and for his brave efforts to gain recognition for his discoveries At the time he failed, so far as human recognition went But even in men's estimation his work did not fail at long last. The records of Hickman's researches have happily been redeemed from oblivion by Dr. Henry Wellcome. And now the Anæsthetic Section of the Royal Society of Medicine has, as you may see on your own Church walls, perpetuated his name in honour for future generations.

Hickman died young, very young so far as a skilled Surgeon's life and training are now counted. I myself once had a College friend who, after a very long and full medical training, died at exactly the same age of 30, died actually before he began to practise. Hick-

man, by stress of need, had practised for some 5 or 6 years before his death, in Shifnal, in Ludlow, and in Tenbury: and this even whilst he was still pursuing his pioneer work. Someone has truly said that in such cases we must not measure the life simply by "length of days," but by what was accomplished in those days, be they many or few. That is quite true even from the earthly side of things. Some of us present here now are fond of calling ourselves "proud Salopians" —at least we may be proud of such a Salopian as was Henry Hickman—pioneer, and benefactor in the cause of suffering humanity. The Bishop of Hereford told us yesterday that Hickman should be reckoned in the list of "Shropshire Worthies," and that in that list his name should by no means come last.

## IV—THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF LONG LIFE

But we who claim to be Christian believers can of course go further than that. We do so every time we say the first and the last words of our Creed:—"I believe in . . . . the life everlasting." For us LIFE, whether of the old or the young, is not "cut off," as the world puts it. It is "transplanted," it is carried on, onwards and upwards to a higher stage. This strong desire for "long life," implanted in our nature, this unwillingness to yield up the breath of our body, this desperate resistance to death, this ever recurring duel between Death and the Doctor—all these things speak to us of that principle of IMMORTAL LIFE which dwells in every MORTAL BEING. The truth is that no number of years, so far as this world's computation goes, will ever satisfy man's natural craving for life.

My brethren, when your time comes to die, you will not wish, each one of you, to be snuffed out like a candle. You will not wish to be swept away like some chance grain of dust from the harvest field of life. It may be indeed that sometimes, when a man is in great pain of mind or body, he may wish for the moment to be hushed into an endless sleep, never to wake or feel again. But that is not man's normal and natural state. For one half hour when he feels thus, he passes whole days and months and years desiring to preserve his life, and to have "length of days."

## CONCLUSION.

So then let this be our final thought to-day—What matters it so much to you whether you be given HERE a "long life" or a "short life," if only death, when it comes, finds you standing at the post of earthly duty, finds you looking to the heavenly end, and finds you seeking the true life, that eternal life for which you were created, that part of your life which is even now:—"hid with Christ in God?" What will it really matter to you, when, where, or how you die, if only these words prove true of you at the last:—"*He asked life of Thee and Thou gavest him a long life: even for ever and ever.*"

No, no, we cannot die.
In Death's unrobing room we strip from round us
The garments of mortality and earth;
And, breaking from the embryo's state that found us,
Our day of dying is our day of birth.